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Viewing cable **06MANAGUA2077, MARTINEZ CUENCA WORRIED ABOUT AN ORTEGA WIN**

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- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
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If you find meaningful or important information in a cable, please link directly to its unique reference number. Linking to a specific paragraph in the body of a cable is also possible by copying the appropriate link (to be found at the paragraph symbol). Please mark messages for social networking services like Twitter with the hash tags **#cablegate** and a hash containing the reference ID e.g. **#06MANAGUA2077**.

Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
06MANAGUA2077	2006-09-21 15:55	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Managua

Appears in these articles:

<http://www.nacion.com/2011-05-30/Mundo/NotasSecundarias/Mundo2758456.aspx>
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<http://www.confidencial.com.ni/articulo/3967/barreto-era-ldquo-fuente-confiable-rdquo-para-eeuu>

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RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7635
INFO RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS PRIORITY 0774
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
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C O N F I D E N T I A L MANAGUA 002077

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/12/2016
TAGS: KDEM NU PGOV SOCI
SUBJECT: MARTINEZ CUENCA WORRIED ABOUT AN ORTEGA WIN

Classified By: AMBASSADOR PAUL TRIVELLI FOR REASONS 1.4 (B AND D)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: During a meeting with Polcouns and emboffs on 11 September, Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) dissident Alejandro Martinez Cuenca voiced his concern that savvy Sandinista campaigning and a weak and distracted center-right have strengthened Daniel Ortega's campaign. The FSLN remains focused on espousing its social agenda and avoiding conflict with the other parties while opponents, particularly the Liberal Constitutional Party (PLC) and Nicaraguan Liberal Alliance (ALN), bicker with each other. Cuenca also commented that the lackluster organizational capacities of the ALN and MRS pose significant obstacles to competing with the larger and more established parties. Although a committed Sandinista, Cuenca made clear his concerns that an Ortega victory would have a detrimental impact on Nicaragua's democracy, noting he is considering publicly calling on similar-minded Sandinistas to "cancel" their votes in November. He estimates about 20% of FSLN supporters would consider not voting for Ortega. Cuenca made clear that despite his distaste for Ortega, he would not back other candidates and does not consider the MRS a viable leftist alternative -- maintaining that the FSLN should remain the dominant leftist party. Cuenca suggested that the United States can play a positive role in the political situation, but would do better to issue tough anti-Ortega messages in Washington rather than in Nicaragua, which would carry more weight, while diminishing accusations of foreign interference. END SUMMARY.

Ortega Running Strong; Opponents Divided and Weak

¶2. (C) Polcouns and emboffs met on 11 September with FSLN dissident/reformer Alejandro Martinez Cuenca to sound out his views on the presidential race, and gauge his attitude toward Daniel Ortega's candidacy and management of his party. According to Cuenca, the best hope for defeating Ortega is by unifying the PLC and ALN, but entrenched interests on both sides make this unlikely to happen. Moreover, commented Cuenca, the PLC and ALN are distracted by sniping at each other's campaigns, giving Ortega the opportunity to take the high-road. Ortega's decision to run a campaign focusing on the party's social agenda rather than attacking opponents has kept him on-message and above the political fray. Cuenca also stated that lack of strong party resources and organization make the ALN and Edmundo Jarquin's Sandinista Renewal Movement (MRS) unlikely to win the presidency. Cuenca opined that these parties do not possess the infrastructure necessary to challenge the

dominant parties in a sustained national race. Cuenca predicted that Ortega will exploit his party's clout in six departments (Matagalpa, Esteli, Jinotega, Ocotal, Rio San Juan, and Somoto) to manipulate the results. He also asserted that, even if victorious, Montealegre will not secure enough deputies to have much influence in the National Assembly. A Montealegre administration thusly handicapped would essentially make for a repeat of the Bolanos administration.

Nicaragua's Democracy Too Frail to Withstand Ortega Radicalism

¶3. (C) Cuenca, who has been a longtime proponent for internal FSLN reform, is unhappy with the way Ortega is running the party. A former Minister of Foreign Trade (1979-87) and Minister of Economic Planning and Budget (1988-90) during the Sandinista era, Cuenca first challenged Ortega in 2000 when he discouraged Ortega from running in the 2001 presidential elections and called for internal party primaries. He has since been kept on the outskirts, but remains committed to the party. During the meeting, he likened Ortega to a dictator, commenting that Ortega has told him "I am the party," that he will never relinquish his hold on the FSLN, and that he would run a fifth and sixth time if not elected in November. Cuenca noted that Ortega's driving goal is to obtain power, and expressed frustration that Ortega's continued adherence to outdated radical ideology (i.e. Marxism, Stalinism) have no place in Nicaragua. He warned that Nicaragua's democracy is not strong enough to sustain an Ortega presidency and that, if elected, Ortega will win enough votes to enact constitutional reforms to strengthen his hold on power within six months. Cuenca is considering conducting a campaign to call on like-minded Sandinistas to turn in blank ballots or deface them in November to demonstrate their discontent with Ortega's radical bent. Cuenca estimates that about 20% of Sandinistas would consider not voting for Ortega. He mentioned that he would need to be careful about which media outlets he reaches out to in order to avoid the perception of endorsing some other political movement. Cuenca was emphatic that any announcement by him must not be construed as an endorsement for any other political movement. Polcouns suggested that he grant interviews to other foreign media sources, including in Europe, to convey a more neutral position.

MRS Not Fit To Be 'New Left'

¶4. (C) While Cuenca holds a moderate leftist ideology, he remains committed to the FSLN and is not likely to support other movements or encourage others to do so. Cuenca believes that Nicaragua needs a moderate left that respects core democratic principles, such as freedom of thought and expression, and sees a role for the FSLN in this process. He has previously told journalists that he thinks the FSLN should contribute to the development of institutions and democracy in Nicaragua. Cuenca does not see the MRS as having the organizational capacity to mount a successful presidential campaign, much less the clout or historical recognition to vie with the FSLN for dominance as the leading leftist party. He told poloffs that while he considers advocating that Sandinistas abstain in November, he would not recommend they support someone else. He made it clear that voting for another party would be a betrayal of the FSLN.

What Can the United States Do?

¶5. (C) Cuenca pointed out that the United States can play a helpful role in preventing an Ortega victory, but stated that the U.S. would have to walk a fine line to avoid

efforts that could set off domestic sensitivities. He first recommended that the U.S. cease issuing direct attacks against Ortega. These comments carry the most weight when issued by domestic sources (i.e. the other candidates), and that Ortega is good at spinning in his favor such messages from U.S. officials. That said, strong anti-Ortega remarks from the United States would be helpful. He noted that one possibility for influence is prompting the Nicaraguan expatriate community in the United States

to warn their family members still in Nicaragua that an Ortega win could jeopardize the flow of remittances. He noted that pursuing the case of Zoilamerica could in fact backfire because in the public's mind it has become politicized, although he acknowledged that Ortega's censureship of the Univision interview with her had drawn strong criticism and attention to her case. Cuenca pointed out that the issue of sexual abuse does not necessarily strike a nerve with most Nicaraguans. According to Cuenca, local culture tends to favor working these sorts of crimes out within a family rather than involving the authorities. Thinking aloud, Cuenca also mentioned the possibility of catching Ortega's wife and campaign manager Rosario Murillo off guard. He noted that she is extremely superstitious, and may be provoked by comments or actions.

¶6. (SBU) Bio information: Rosario Murillo was educated in France and speaks French and English. Cuenca noted that she is extremely bright, well-read, and articulate. He also said that she is very superstitious. He claims she once stopped a meeting until a priest could be summoned to consecrate the office it was being held in.

¶7. (C) Comment: Cuenca's assessment of how damaging the PLC-ALN bickering has been is right on the mark. Not only does it distract both parties from striking out at Ortega and presenting their own agendas, but it grants Ortega the ability to espouse his platform virtually unchallenged. This, combined with his skillful handling of a socially-focused campaign could grant him an edge over his competitors in the long run. Cuenca's estimation that 20% of Sandinistas might consider not voting for Ortega may be exaggerated. Cuenca has overestimated resistance within the party to Ortega in the past. He told the Embassy in 2001, for example, that Ortega could be induced to step down as his party's candidate for the 2001 election. Ortega in fact overrode opposition to his candidacy by marginalizing challengers, including Cuenca.
End Comment.

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